Note by LMB: this interview was done in 2008 by Hrvoje Beljan, then in association with the Croatian science fiction convention Rikon. I see I ducked some of the work, but perhaps it was easier to for him to just write the intro in Croatian in the first place when translating for its Croatian audience. The translated interview appeared either May 10 or October 5, 2008, I'm not quite sure which, here:

http://www.fantasy-hr.com/content/view/789/88/

It's also available here:

http://3zmaj.hr/eridan/br7-lmb/

First of all let me just say that it is such an immense honor and pleasure that you agreed to this interview. Your fanbase in Croatia is very strong and your Vorkosigan Saga novels are very popular and we at the society seriously hope your fantasy novels will also be translated soon.
Could you give us a short introduction, both about yourself and your literary work so far, for our readers who are new to your work?

[Introducing the guest speaker is normally the job of the conference host–I think you all should write this part. Feel free to crib data/ check facts from my website bio and other materials at www.dendarii.com]

In January 2002. you visited Croatia. What do you remember of the visit? When someone mentions Croatia, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

I actually wrote a little memoir soon after I got home, in an attempt to capture my impressions. It's up on my website at http://www.dendarii.com/croatia02.html . But I won't cheat by peeking at it first.

Whatever comes to my mind first is soon overtaken by a cascade of associated memories; I'm surprised at how much comes back to me once I start thinking about it. I remember I was very well taken care of by the convention and by my Croatian publisher, and how impressed and daunted I was by how many people spoke and read English, when I didn't possess a word of Croatian. Without them, I would have been rendered as good as mute. I had a wonderful time walking around Zageb with some fan friends, bought a big book on its history, and used the city later as a rough template for the medieval town of Easthome in *The Hallowed Hunt.* The convention folks took

me up to the Bear Castle, too, a lovely outing. After the convention, my publisher took me on a short book tour down to the coast–vivid high points include a fish dinner at a seaside outdoor restautant, and seeing the full moon rising through the arches of the Roman ampitheater on the Istrian shore.

My publisher came up with a TV interview for me the last Monday morning. *Very* early. It's not a medium I have much practice in, I was nervous and tired, and I did not do very well, I'm afraid, although it didn't help that the first question I was asked was mis-translated, so I rattled on for several minutes saying something else altogether. Oops. I'm used to having an hour to fill at convention question and answer sessions–I have to learn to be more succinct for this sort of thing!

My publisher's very kindly interpreter invited me home for cake and more conversation on my last night there, after yet another publicity bash, but I was so burned out by then I turned her down, a treat I still regret missing. I could have made up the sleep the following week...

And the smoking, of course. All European venues have more cigarette smoke floating about than Americans have become used to.

And looking out my hotel window across to the very nineteenth century facades of the buildings across the square, and noticing the very twenty-first century satellite dishes tucked about in them.

And the trams–trolley cars are a memory of my visits to my grandmother in Pittsburgh in my youth, but they were gone by the time I was a teenager.

The three Chalion books have been contracted to Algoritam, by the way. I don't know what happened to them after that, or how far along they may be in the translation and publication process. I don't seem to have author's copies yet, which are usually my only proof that a title has hit print. I don't think my agent has received an offer on *The Sharing Knife* books as yet, although a number of the Miles books recently had their contracts renewed. The Croatian covers for the Vorkosigan books remain some of my favorite foreign covers.

Your Vorkosigan novels are very popular and very famous in Croatia. Could you tell us how the whole thing started? Where did the idea for Miles come from? How much hope did you have for the novels i.e. did you think that the series would go on to spawn fourteen novels, all of them bestsellers?

Miles himself came as real people do–from his parents. I have a catch-phrase to describe my plot-generation technique–"What's the worst possible thing I can do to *these* people?" Miles was already in my mind even when I was still writing *Shards of Honor*. For his parents Aral and Cordelia, living in a militaristic, patriarchal culture

that prizes physical perfection and has an historically-driven horror of mutation, having a handicapped son and heir was a major life challenge, a Great Test. Miles has a number of real-life roots–models from history such as T.E. Lawrence and young Winston Churchill, a physical template in a handicapped hospital pharmacist I'd worked with, most of all his bad case of "great man's son syndrome," which owes much to my relationship with my father. But with his first book, *The Warrior's Apprentice*, he quickly took on a life of his own; his charisma and drive, his virtues and his failings–and he has both–are now all his.

Characters are created by their actions–"What you are is what you do" is never more true than on the page. Miles's actions have created Miles for a dozen books, now, so he's had a chance to grow pretty complex. Characters in turn create and constrain the possibilities of one's plot, and yet for me, characters and stories also create their settings, so it's all balled up together in the end anyway. So there has never been a great over-arcing plan for Miles's life; I make him up one book at a time.

Here in the USA, my books have been not so much bestsellers–at least, not in the *New York Times* List sense, although they've been genre bestsellers–as what are called Evergreens, books that sell in modest numbers *forever*. Every book I have ever written is still in print. When I sat down to write *Shards of Honor* in 1982, I don't think I could have imagined it still being read in 2008, because I don't think I could have imagined 2008. (I stay away from near-future science fiction for a reason.) It still boggles my mind, here in the twenty-first century, to think of my books from back then being read in China. In 1982, that would have *been* science fiction.

Have the Vorkosigan novels ever been considered for a film adaptation by a studio? Would you like to see the novels adapted to film or tv series? Do you have any casting ideas, especially for the actor playing Miles?

The Warrior's Apprentice was in fact optioned for film in the mid-1990s. The option money paid for my move to Minneapolis, for which I must be grateful, but no film was ever made, for which I must be even more grateful–I read the script, and it was dire. I am in no hurry any more for a media adaptation–I'm willing to wait for a producer to come along who actually loves the books, rather than one who regards them as a ***property***, to be chopped up at will. I have no casting ideas for current actors, although Aral should look rather like the late Oliver Reed in his younger and healthier days.

The universe of the Vorkosigan Saga grew in detail with every new book. Are the planets and cultures represented in the novels based on parts of Earth's history or are they your own creations? I ask because one of the planets is called Illyrica and the people who inhabited parts of what is today Croatia in the ancient times were called Illyrians.

The planets of the Nexus are based on all sorts of sources, variously blended. Nothing is a direct copy, but rather, a complicated braid of science, history, persons, other stories, and my own views on human behavior. I'm afraid Illyrica was no more than a name pulled off a map for me at the time I made it up–and only for a throw-away line at that.

You are currently writing the Sharing Knife fantasy series. Could you tell us something about the characters and plot so far?

The Sharing Knife began as a single fantasy-romance novel, divided into a duology for publication due to length. Since my original vision for it was completed, it's grown by two more volumes. The first, split story was titled *The Sharing Knife, Vol. 1: Beguilement* and *The Sharing Knife, Vol. 2: Legacy*, which were first published in October 2006 and June 2007, respectively.

The second pair of books are a bit more rounded in structure, as they were written to be a duology from the get-go: Volume 3, *Passage*, is due for hardcover release April 22, 2008; the fourth and final volume, *Horizon*, which is now finished and turned in, is slated for February 2009. The latter pair were going around with the working title of *The Wide Green World* for a time, but my publisher Eos preferred the unified series title so as not to unduly confuse booksellers, and book buyers. It's appropriate–this really is one long story divided into four volumes, although each duology pair and each individual volume also have story arcs that reach some closure within them.

Think of four hoops in a row contained by two hoops all contained by one hoop; the main over-arching thematic hoop will only be discernable once the four underlying parts are all in place, but there's plenty to entertain a reader at the other story-levels while waiting.

So all four volumes will be in readers' hands within the space of three and a half years, there will be no delays in manuscript delivery,

and even if I get run over by a bus tomorrow, the tale is complete. I hope y'all appreciate this.

The Sharing Knife begins as the tale of two people, Fawn Bluefield, a young farmer girl running away from home for some very traditional reasons, who meets Dag Redwing Hickory, a seasoned soldier-sorcerer from a nomadic people called the Lakewalkers, who are dedicated to hunting down and killing a recurring supernatural menace called by his people, malices, and by hers, blight bogles. The sharing knife of the title is a critical magical weapon to this purpose, and the revelation of just what the knives are and how they work is part of the plot.

When both characters are caught up in a malice hunt, a peculiar accident happens to one of Dag's sharing knives, which binds the couple together for a time until the mystery can be solved. Propinquity leads to romance leads to, eventually, troubles (and growth) and a new engagement with their world that neither of them could have imagined at the tale's beginning. *The Sharing Knife* does not have a villain-driven plot, but it does have a strong direction-of-movement, so I didn't find it felt any different in the day-to-day writing than my more tightly-plotted books.

The books and the series have also been my chance to play with genres, attempting to blend fantasy and romance. This turns out to be a trickier proposition than it looks, as the two genres have different focuses, reader expectations, structures, and scopes. The focus of a romance is normally personal: it's the tale of a successful courtship, beginning when the two protagonists meet and ending when their relationship, explored and tested by the plot, is finally confirmed by a lasting commitment. By the end, the reader expects to understand that couple. The focus of a fantasy is normally its world, which may almost be considered another character; we expect to meet that world, get to know it, be shown what makes it different. By the end, the reader expects to understand that world.

So I deliberately set myself the problem of weaving these two disparate structures together in *The Sharing Knife*. This is in part aided by the two protagonists being themselves representatives of the two main cultures of their shown world, so I can explore those world-aspects through them. Whether I've succeeded will be for the readers to say when the whole work comes out–the reader responses so far seem to be interestingly bifurcated. Some folks relish the blend; others become as hysterical as a toddler who discovers his peas are touching his mashed potatoes.

At the end of the first two volumes of *The Sharing Knife*, the matter of the romance was resolved to my satisfaction and that of its

mother genre, which was mainly what I first set out to do. I might well have left Dag and Fawn there, at least for a time. But the matter of the world still begged some questions, hence the second duology, *Passage* and *Horizon*. These are both journey stories–one a river journey and the other a road trip, both American classic tropes, very appropriate to the American-inspired frontier fantasy world setting of these books. They continuie from the end of *Legacy*, still with Dag and Fawn as viewpoint characters.

Oh, speaking of sources. All the *Sharing Knife* settings are based on rural Midwestern landscapes of my childhood. *Passage* especially drew on not only my memories of houseboating on the Ohio River in my youth, but also on some wonderful source material, much of it first-hand accounts, of life on the Western Waters, as the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri and Tennessee river systems are jointly dubbed, in the early nineteenth century era of keelboats and steamboats. I put an Author's Note in the back of the volume naming the most fascinating books, if folks are interested in following up later.

Your Chalion series garnered much acclaim worldwide. It's fascinating how you made your mark in both science-fiction and fantasy. Which genre do you enjoy writing more?

I like them both about equally. I've always read both, from the very beginnings of my exploration of the genres as a child.

Is it hard to be a sci-fi/fantasy writer in the USA? How different is your life and experiences as an author at this point in life when compared to when you started writing in the '80s?

It's hard to be a writer anywhere, I think. The USA seems more friendly to the F&SF genres than, say, Britain, or so I'm told. We have a large enough fan community that we hardly need to look for moral support outside it, which has both good and bad aspects. (There's a temptation to grow insular.)

Then and now, oh heavens. In the early 1980s, just before publication, I was a desperate housewife living in poverty stuck in a small town with two small children and an erratic spouse, with almost no friends, and no job (except for writing three books in three years, which no one did count as my work, before they sold.) Twenty-two books and years later, my children are grown and launched, I've been happily divorced for many years, I live in a vibrant city, I have a comfortable income, a large circle of interesting friends, and all the

travel I can manage and then some. If this had been a cunning plan, I would have to say it worked a treat, but I cannot discount a great deal of earned luck. (I am lucky my books sold to Baen, but I earned that luck by writing them and sending them out to the place where that luck could happen.)

In the past decade the internet has had an increasing impact on my daily life as a writer, not all of it good. I spend a large part of each day as my own secretary and publicity manager, doing tasks I didn't have to do back in the '80s or '90s. E-mail from fans is much easier to answer than snail mail, but there is also much more of it. I have much closer communications with my agent and editor, which is good, but my publishers also keep coming up with PR chores that take time from my actual fiction writing, not to mention my life–writing blog posts and e-mail interviews and so on–that never used to exist. I've also discovered how to ego-surf, oops.

Wikipedia is both a blessing and a curse for writerly research. You go online to look up a description of, say, eclampsia, and three hours later find yourself reading an earnest explanation of tentacle porn in anime, with no very clear memory of how you got there and where the time went.

Which writers influenced you most when you started writing? Which writers do you consider to be currently the best in the genre? What are some of your favorite books and movies, genre and non-genre?

I have a long list of early favorites. In includes, but is not limited to, Poul Anderson, Randall Garrett, Cordwainer Smith, James H. Schmitz, Eric Frank Russell, Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexander Dumas, Dorothy Sayers, Georgette Heyer, and J.R.R. Tolkien. I do not read enough in the SF genre these days to have a good idea who is best or most to my taste–I've been exploring in other directions lately, including non-fiction (history and popular science, mostly), and romances, and watching Japanese animation and science and nature programming through my Netflix subscription. I also read friends' manuscripts, but I'm not sure that counts. I also spend way too much time on-line, but that might be classifed as observing human behavior.

Favorites to which I return over and over include the works of Heyer, Tolkien, and Terry Pratchett (speaking of current best writers). I loved the recent *Lord of the Rings* movies, even though as a book purist I found they contained many wince-worthy moments, *ow, ow*. I still watched them far too many times. In the very distant past, the Richard Lester two-part film adaptation of *The Three Musketeers* is still fondly remembered. I like all kinds of modern animation,

including *Shrek, The Incredibles,* and *Cars*.

And finally, the question you probably get asked twice a day: do you plan to write new Vorkosigan novel/novels? And if so, could you give us some hints as to what you have in store for everybody's favorite Imperial Auditor?

Now that the last two volumes of *The Sharing Knife* are in the bag, the next thing on my plate is indeed a contract for a new Miles Vorkosigan novel for publisher Toni Weisskopf at Baen Books. It's in the delicate pre-writing development stage right now, just starting to generate scribbled notes in my notebook, much interrupted by the onslaught of preparation for the *Passage* launch and tour and about a million other PR and career-maintenance chores, including being Guest of Honor at this year's Worldcon in Denver. (The convention isn't till August but they want about 5k words from me for the program book this month, please ma'am. I really can't say no.) Anyway, I expect to write the new Miles book in 2008 (it's also off to a later start than planned, so work on it will likely slop over the end of this year) for publication late in 2009. Probably.

It's too early to talk about it in more detail yet, but you may be assured, it will be a book and it will have Miles in it.

Thank you very much for this interview, Mrs. Bujold.

Respectfully,

Hrvoje Beljan